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The "West Bank" and Gaza Should Israel withdraw from the territories?

The "intifada," the uprising of Arab Palestinians in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza has been going on since December of 1987. It has so far caused over 1000 deaths. Many believe that the conflict would end if Israel were to withdraw from the territories, cede them to the Palestinian Arabs, and allow them to create a Palestinian state in them.

What are the facts?

■ The suggestion that Israel should give up the territories and that good things would flow from that is based on two assumptions, namely 1) that the demands of the Palestinian Arabs for independence from Israel are the source of the Arab conflict with Israel; and 2) that Israel's withdrawal from the territories and the creation of a Palestinian state in them would satisfy the aspirations of the Palestinian Arabs, that it would end the hostility of the Arab nations against Israel, and that it would restore peace to the area.

■ Unfortunately, both of these assumptions are not in accord with reality. The desire of the Arab nations to destroy Israel has been unrelenting from the day of the creation of Israel in 1948. It has given rise to five major wars, has caused tens of thousands of casualties, and untold destruction. The PLO, whose covenant—never changed and never amended—unequivocally calls for the destruction of Israel, was founded in 1964, long before Israel's administration in the territories. Thus, the almost single-minded obsession of the Arabs to destroy Israel, and not Israel's refusal to accede to the creation of a Palestinian state, is the cause of the never-ending conflict in the area.

■ It is difficult for the Western mind to understand the depth of passion on the part of the Arabs for the destruction of Israel. Among reasonable people, most conflicts might eventually be amenable to peaceful and rational solution. But in the Arab-Israel conflict, no such solution is in the cards for the foreseeable future. The reason is that 300 million Arabs consider the very

existence of Israel an intolerable offense to their sense of history and destiny. It is not Israel's administration of the "West Bank" that is unacceptable to the Arabs; it is the very existence of Israel. There is no reason to believe that Israel's withdrawal and the establishment of a Palestinian state would appease the Arabs and induce them to make peace with Israel.

■ One can speculate as to what would be likely to happen if Israel—inadvisedly or ultimately bowing to pressure—were to yield the "West Bank" to Arab control. The murderous fratricidal passions that have been played out in Lebanon in the last fifteen years would be repeated in even more violent form. It is an improbable expectation that a state dominated by the murderous PLO would be the first Arab state ever to adhere to anything resembling democratic and human rights principles or that it would be a friend of the United States, and not an eager pawn of the Soviet Union.

■ The Lebanon slaughter would be shifted to the new Palestinian state, with Israel being a more likely target of its fury. A Palestinian Arab state on the "West Bank" would cut through Jerusalem, touch on the suburbs of Tel Aviv, and have a long border, nine to fifteen miles from the sea, with Israel's most thickly populated areas. Palestinian militias, armed, not with gasoline bombs and stones, but with helicopters, missiles, artillery and automatic weapons, would have Israeli pedestrians within rifle range, and Zion Square in Jerusalem and Ben Gurion airport within mortar range.

Few responsible elements in Israel's government and society wish to annex Gaza and the territories of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank"). But also, hardly any responsible elements would consider relinquishing those territories for the creation of a Palestinian state. The Palestinian Arabs enjoy full civil rights and have been offered free elections and full autonomy by Israel, in line with Israel's commitments in the Camp David Accords. Moreover, Israel is ready and has always been ready to discuss the permanent status of the territories with responsible Palestinian representatives three years after the implementation of the autonomy. The situation of Israel and the territories is a bad one—no doubt about it. But the alternative to bad is not necessarily good. In this case, at least at the present time, the alternative would likely be a catastrophe, which, in its consequences, could even put the horrible situation of Lebanon in the shade. Real peace in the area will not come by Israel's yielding minimum strategic depth to its mortal enemies. It can only come about by the eventual rise of democratic governments in the "front-line" Arab states, governments that would accept Israel's existence and could learn to live in peaceful co-existence with it.

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